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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis of this study is that at the six-months level of employment at the Florida Division of Family Services, social workers with a bachelor of social work (BSW) degree will have a more positive attitude toward the usefulness of their education than those employees in the division of family services holding the bachelor of arts (BA) in another discipline. The sample consisted of 150 randomly selected social workers. A social work training usability scale, containing 60 attitude items, was developed as an attitude measurment scale. Of the 150 questionnaires administered, 83 percent were returned. Five major conclusions were derived from the data: (1) BSW social workers feel strongly that their education has been useful in their work in the social services area; (2) degree holders in both social work and other disciplines feel that they are overprepared for working in the payments area; (3) BA social workers do not feel that a BSW degree would be helpful on the job, yet feel strongly that specialized knowledge in work with individuals, groups, and community would be helpful on the job; (4) as age increases, desire for specialized training also increases; and (5) respondents in the payments area suggested several courses which may be relevant for education or inservice training. The study can be of value to administrators of the Division of Family Services in evaluating the effectiveness and policy of employing and training practitioners whose degrees are in areas of study unrelated to social work. (Author/JR)

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ATTITUDES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN A WELFARE DEPARTMENT TOWARD THE USEFULNESS OF THEIR EDUCATION

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Context of the Problem

The profession of social work is at this time governed by two agencies; the Council on Social Work Education and the Division of Family Services. The function of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is to accredit graduate and undergraduate schools of social work. This accreditation process sanctioned by the Department of Education assures minimum educational standards for the first level of practice in social work. Schools of social work are governed by CSWE standards of accreditation and may not deviate from those standards if they are to remain accredited.

Most schools of social work are also governed by the Division of Family Services (DFS).* This form of governance is more covert than that of the CSWE, but just as imperative to the existence of social work programs. The DFS under HEW Title XX, funds schools via grant money to train students to become social workers in the Division of Family Services. Students, upon graduation, seek employment in social agencies, in particular the State Division of Family Services. However, the Florida State DFS retains a policy of employing first level practitioners whose college degrees are in areas of study unrelated to social work, if they are able to pass a state merit examination. This policy has created conflict between the state agency and schools of social work. Much of the funding for programs

*More commonly known as welfare department.

in social work education come from the DFS and yet a graduate from a DFS funded program often finds himself in competition with graduates whose training is unrelated to the job for which he is applying. At this time, DFS is attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of CSWE educational governance policy to determine if those standards are appropriate for social work employees at DFS. This will be accomplished by determining differences between the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Work employees' attitudes toward the usefulness of their education for the practice of social work. This study will allow DFS to decide if current CSWE standards for accreditation are appropriate for that agency. Thus, alleviating current possible governance conflict. Thus, it is the purpose of this paper to determine attitudinal differences, if any, between Bachelor of Arts social workers and Bachelor of Social Work employees in a welfare agency as they relate to the usefulness of their education in doing social work in that agency.

Review of the Literature

Although there is no literature directly relating to attitudes of students' education to on-the-job relevance, there is a considerable amount of literature on the training relationship between agency and professional schools of social work. This literature brings to light the heart of conflict between agency and professional schools as to what, and how relevant professional training is as seen by professionals in education versus professionals in practice.

In 1971, McPheeters and Ryan edited the book, The Core of Competence for the Baccaluareate Social Work Practitioner. This core of competence was developed by a 17 member task force to develop the specific kinds of knowledge, skills, and values the direct practitioner was to know when he graduated from college. This model was not accepted by some agencies because they only practiced one of the three basic methods outlined in the core of competence. Thus, as in the case with the agency to be used in this study, there may well be conflict between what workers are taught in school and opportunity to implement these skills and knowledge in practice. Thus, a BSW employee at the Division of Family Services may have professional training and yet see his education as irrelevant as it relates to his "real world" job.

Charles S. Levy in, "A Framework for Planning and Evaluating Social Work Education" (1972) argued that the loci of accountability of evaluating social work education should be a delicate balance of attitudes of the accreditation body, agencies, the profession, the clients, and the practitioners. The question then arises as to what extent the educator has been accountable to the first level practitioner.

The Core of Competence states the attitudes and values of the accreditation body, but this view is many times in conflict with the agencies who hire social work graduates. Welfare departments throughout the country have voiced discontent with the relevance of social work curriculum for their agency (Stanley, 1973). The focus of this

study will therefore be a pilot study to assess and compare attitudes of professionally trained students in social work to those working without the professional degree. This information, may in turn, open a new dialogue between bodies which govern professional social work.

Hypothesis

AT THE SIX MONTHS LEVEL OF EMPLOYMENT AT THE FLORIDA DIVISION OF FAMILY SERVICES, SOCIAL WORKERS WITH THE BACCALAUREATE DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK WILL HAVE A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE USEFULNESS OF THEIR EDUCATION THAN THOSE EMPLOYEES IN THE DIVISION OF FAMILY SERVICES HOLDING THE BACCALAUREATE DEGREE IN ANOTHER DISCIPLINE.

Significance of the Study

It is hoped that this study will be of direct value to administrators of the Division of Family Services in deciding whether or not they will continue funding universities for the training of direct practice workers for their agency. If it is found that the BSW workers have positive attitudes about the usefulness of their training, it may be inferred that more professional and specialized hiring is needed for social work in the Division of Family Services. Finally, if there is no significant differences in attitudes found between the BA and BSW social worker, the notions of conflict between educators and field workers would be confirmed indicating a need for further study and serious questions raised

concerning the usefulness of professional social work education for social workers at the Division of Family Services.

Procedure

A "social work training usability scale" was developed as an attitude measurement scale. This instrument contained 60 attitude items. The scale used to test items was an equal appearing internal scale. This pre-test questionnaire was sent to a random sample of BA and BSW practitioners working in a Division of Family Services in a neighboring state. Using the Alpha-Crombach test for internal reliability, it was found that 26 items were highly consistent. These items were then used as the final questionnaire for employees at DFS.

Subjects

The sample consisted of 150 social workers, randomly selected, who have been working at DFS for six months or more. The sample was drawn from state DFS computer files which indicated length of employment and job description. After the sample was drawn, a list of chosen names was sent to personnel directors of the 11 divisions throughout the state. The directors administered the questionnaires. A cover letter assured that the subjects' information and comments would remain anonymous and data from this questionnaire would not affect an individual's employment.

Data Analysis

This study was criterion group design in which a type "C" operational definition was used. The Pearson Product correlations

test was used in order to determine difference in attitudes of the BA social worker and the BSW social worker. The correlations were tested to the .05 level of correlation significance.

Results

Of the 150 questionnaires administered, 125 or 83% were returned. The factors correlated with attitudes were age, sex, major in college, years working at DFS, and attitudes of persons in payments versus services.

The hypothesis that BSW social workers would have more positive attitudes toward the usefulness of their education met with mixed results. BSW social workers working in the services felt very positive toward their education and felt that knowledge in the three practice areas was useful for them. The BSW social workers who work in payments felt very strongly that they were overprepared for their job. While BA social workers did not particularly feel they needed a degree in social work they tended to feel specialized training in work with individuals, groups, and communities would be useful for them. This data is overwhelmingly confirmed in the comments section. It was surprising to find that over 95% of respondents wrote comments at the end of the questionnaire. The BSW respondents overwhelmingly responded that their education was very useful for them in their work. However, BSW social workers working in payments were extremely dissatisfied and felt they were not able to use skills learned in college in their place of employment.

The BA college graduates concurred that not only the BSW overprepared them, but a college degree is not necessary to be a skilled payments worker. Several respondents gave positive input as to the types of courses which may be helpful for the payments worker. The suggested courses were in the areas of interviewing, law, money management, and consumer education. Both BA and BSW social workers valued job experience and field training as an excellent and necessary tool to integrate conceptual knowledge and the realities of the day to day work experience.

It is interesting to note that age was a major factor in attitudes toward BSW education. As age increased, the attitudes toward the need for specialized education increased. At the same time, there were no significant correlation between the length of time employed and attitudes toward education. Educators and program administrators may hold preconceived notions that as one works for a period of years a person gets locked into a routine and rejects the idea of education as necessary. The data does not support this assumption. As one becomes older, the quest for specialized knowledge and skills increases significantly.

Discussion

There are several significant conclusions derived from the data:

1) BSW social workers feel strongly their education has been useful in their work if they work in the social services area.

2) BSW and BA social workers feel they are overprepared for working in the payments area.

3) Respondents in the payments area suggested several courses which may be relevant for education or inservice training.

4) BA social workers do not feel that a BSW degree would be particularly helpful on the job, yet feel strongly that specialized knowledge in work with individuals, groups, and community would be helpful on the job.

5) As age increases, desire for specialized training also increases.

Because social work education is seen as valuable by social service employees but not valuable for payments employees, it would seem that the Council on Social Work Education, in cooperation with the Division of Family Services, could launch an AA degree program in social work designed for the payments worker or give employees increased inservice training for payments type work. It would also seem, as relates to conclusion four, that because BA social workers may not desire a degree in social work but desire specialized training, the problem may be twofold: people may not desire a BSW degree because social work is a low status occupation or more likely, many people including employed social workers are not aware of course curriculum taught in schools of social work. It would therefore, seem an appropriate task of social welfare educators to greatly improve means of apprising the public as to the structure and function of social work education.

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